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SUPREME COURT OF THE UNITED STATES

OCTOBER TERM, 1952

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No. 113

ROY WEBBER TINDER, JR., PETITIONER,

vs.

THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

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ON WRIT OF CERTIORARI TO THE UNITED STATES COURT OF APPEALS  
FOR THE FOURTH CIRCUIT

FILED JANUARY 17, 1953

CERTIORARI GRANTED JUNE 9, 1952

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## INDEX

	Original	Print
Record from U.S.D.C. for the Eastern District of Virginia, Norfolk Division	1	1
Caption (omitted in printing)	1	
Indictment	2	1
Minute entry of arraignment and plea	4	3
Minute entry of judgment	5	3
Judgment and commitment	6	3
Letter from Clerk to Roy Webber Tinder, dated De- cember 8, 1950 (Copy)	7	4
Letter from W. H. Hiatt, Warden to Clerk of U.S.D.C. dated December 6, 1950	8	5
Motion to vacate, set aside and correct sentence	9	5
Order denying motion	18	9
Order allowing defendant to proceed in forma pau- peris, etc.	19	9
Letter from Roy Webber Tinder, Jr. to Clerk, dated August, 1951	21	10
Affidavit in forma pauperis, Roy Webber Tinder, Jr.	22	10
Motion to correct illegal sentence	24	11
Memorandum opinion denying motion to vacate sen- tence	30	14
Order denying motion to vacate, set aside and correct sentence and allowing defendant to proceed in forma pauperis	35	16

Record from U.S.D.C. for the Eastern District of Virginia, Norfolk Division—Continued		Original
Notice of appeal		37
Affidavit in forma pauperis		38
Designation of defendant as to record		40
Order allowing defendant to prosecute an appeal		41
Clerk's certificate	(omitted in printing)	42
Proceedings in U.S.C.A. for the Fourth Circuit		43
Minute entries		43
Opinion, Chesnut, J.		45
Judgment		55
Order staying mandate	(omitted in printing)	55
Order authorizing Clerk to use original transcript of record in making up record for Supreme Court (omitted in printing)		56
Clerk's certificate	(omitted in printing)	57
Order allowing certiorari		58

[Caption omitted]

[File endorsement omitted]

IN UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT FOR THE EASTERN DISTRICT OF  
VIRGINIA, NORFOLK DIVISION

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

v.

ROY WEBBER TINDER, JR.

INDICTMENT—Filed July 10, 1950

The Grand Jury charges:

That on or about the 1st day of March, 1950, at Norfolk, Virginia, in the Eastern District of Virginia and within the jurisdiction of this Court, ROY WEBBER TINDER, JR. did unlawfully and feloniously take from the letter box or mail receptacle of one Mrs. Evelyn H. Carlisle a letter addressed to her, the said Mrs. Evelyn H. Carlisle, as 500 Botetourt Street, Norfolk, Virginia; contrary to the form of the statute in such case made and provided, and against the peace and dignity of the United States of America. (Title 18, Section 1708, U.S.C.A.)

Second Count

The Grand Jury further charges:

That on or about the 5th day of April, 1950, at Norfolk, Virginia, in the District and jurisdiction aforesaid, ROY WEBBER TINDER, JR. did unlawfully and feloniously take from the letter box or mail receptacle of one James Earl Ainsley a letter addressed to him, the said James Earl Ainsley, at 334 Boush Street, Norfolk, Virginia; contrary to the form of the statute in such case made and provided, and against the peace and dignity of the United States of America. (Title 18, Section 1708, U.S.C.A.)

Third Count

The Grand Jury further charges:

That on or about the 21st day of April, 1950, at Norfolk, Virginia, in the District and jurisdiction aforesaid, ROY WEBBER TINDER, JR. did unlawfully and feloniously take from the letter box or mail receptacle of one Joseph S. Hume a letter addressed to him, the said Joseph S. Hume, at 901 Spotswood Avenue, Norfolk, Virginia; contrary to the form of the statute in such case made and provided, and against the peace and dignity of the United States of America. (Title 18, Section 1708, U.S.C.A.)

3 Fourth Count

The Grand Jury further charges:

That on or about the 29th day of April, 1950, at Norfolk, Virginia, in the District and jurisdiction aforesaid, ROY WEBBER TINDER, JR., did unlawfully and feloniously take from the letter box or mail receptacle of one Carl F. Ward a letter addressed to him, the said Carl F. Ward, at 1712 Hampton Boulevard, Norfolk, Virginia; contrary to the form of the statute in such case made and provided, and against the peace and dignity of the United States of America. (Title 18, Section 1708, U.S.C.A.)

Fifth Count

The Grand Jury further charges:

That on or about the 2nd day of May, 1950, at Norfolk, Virginia, in the District and jurisdiction aforesaid, ROY WEBBER TINDER, JR. did unlawfully and feloniously take from the letter box or mail receptacle of one Miss Lucia D. Jordan a letter addressed to her, the said Miss Lucia D. Jordan, at Apartment C-5, 7200 Hampton Boulevard, Norfolk, Virginia; contrary to the form of the statute in such case made and provided, and against the peace and dignity of the United States of America. (Title 18, Section 1708, U.S.C.A.)

Sixth Count

The Grand Jury further charges:

That on or about the 3rd day of May, 1950, at Norfolk, Virginia, in the District and jurisdiction aforesaid, ROY WEBBER TINDER, JR. did unlawfully and feloniously take from the letter box or mail receptacle of one Jennette White a letter addressed to her, the said Jennette White, at 7200 Hampton Boulevard, Norfolk, Virginia; contrary to the form of the statute in such case made and provided, and against the peace and dignity of the United States of America. (Title 18, Section 1708, U.S.C.A.)

A True Bill:

GEO. C. HENKEL,  
Foreman.

GEORGE R. HUMRICKHOUSE,  
United States Attorney.

## 4 IN UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT

## MINUTE ENTRY OF ARRAIGNMENT AND PLEAS—July 10, 1950

William B. Eley, Assistant United States Attorney appeared for the United States and Robert Pontifex, Atty. appeared on behalf of the Defendant. Waived formal arraignment and entered a plea of guilty. Motion was made to transfer to Norfolk for hearing. Motion granted.

## 5 IN UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT

[Title omitted]

## MINUTE ENTRY OF JUDGMENT—September 13, 1950

Defendant to be committed to custody of the Attorney General or his duly authorized representative for a period of THREE YEARS on each count, unless sooner released by operation of law; sentences to run concurrently.

Memorandum: The above Minutes (transcript) of Reporter-Court-Mrs. Mary White Bible have not been written up or available as said Reporter has been incapacitated. She is Court Reporter from Charleston, W. Va.

6 [File endorsement omitted]

## IN UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT

[Title omitted]

## JUDGMENT AND COMMITMENT—Filed September 13, 1950

On this 13th day of September, 1950, came the attorney for the government and the defendant appeared in person and by Counsel. Defendant having previously waived arraignment and entered a plea of guilty.

It is Adjudged that the defendant has been convicted upon his plea of guilty of the offense of violation of Title 18, Sec. 1708, U.S.C.A. (Theft from Mail Receptacles) as charged in Six Counts of the Indictment and the court having asked the defendant whether he has anything to say why judgment should not be pronounced, and no sufficient cause to the contrary being shown or appearing to the Court,

It is adjudged that the defendant is guilty as charged and convicted.

It is adjudged that the defendant is hereby committed to the custody of the Attorney General or his authorized representative for



imprisonment for a period of THREE (3) YEARS ON EACH COUNT OF THE INDICTMENT, said sentences to run concurrently, unless sooner released by operation of law.

It is adjudged that —.

It is ordered that the Clerk deliver a certified copy of this judgment and commitment to the United States Marshal or other qualified officer and that the copy serve as the commitment of the defendant.

BEN MOONEY,

*United States District Judge.*

The Court recommends commitment to:

(Signed) \_\_\_\_\_  
Clerk.

(By) \_\_\_\_\_  
*Deputy Clerk.*

7 In re:

TINDER, Roy Webber ads. United States

December 8th, 1950.

Roy Webber Tinder 70573-A,  
United States Penitentiary,  
Atlanta, Georgia.

Dear Sir:

Your motion to vacate and set aside and correct sentence was received here today.

Since this case is not docketed in the Richmond Division of the Court and apparently is handled by my Norfolk Office, I am forwarding your motion today to Norfolk for docketing and presentation to the Court. Any further communications you may have should be addressed to me at Federal Bldg., Norfolk 1, Virginia.

Yours very truly,

WALKLEY E. JOHNSON, *Clerk,*

by:

GLOVER N. BUCK,  
*Deputy Clerk.*

cc: Inc. to:  
Clerk's Office,  
Norfolk, Va.

cc: Warden, U. S.  
Penitentiary,  
Atlanta, Ga.

8

IN UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT

Department of Justice

United States Penitentiary

Atlanta, Georgia

December 6, 1950

Clerk of Courts  
United States District Court  
Eastern District of Virginia  
Richmond, Virginia

RE: TINDER, ROY WEBBER

Reg. No. 70573-A

Motion to Vacate and Set Aside and Correct Sentence

Dear Sir:

At the request of the inmate I am forwarding for your disposition the legal papers indicated above.

Please acknowledge receipt. This may be done by return of this letter with appropriate notation thereon if you so desire.

Any reply you make to the attachment should be addressed to the inmate in care of this office.

Sincerely yours,

W. H. HIATT,  
Warden.

Incl.  
JW

9

IN UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT

[Title omitted]

Criminal Case

MOTION TO VACATE, SET ASIDE AND CORRECT SENTENCE, AS REQUIRED  
UNDER SECTION 2255, TITLE 28, U.S.C.A.

To the Honorable, Sterling Hutchenson, Judge of the above entitled Court.

Petitioners verified Motion for Correction of Sentences

Comes now, Roy Webber Tinder, Jr.

The petitioner in the above entitled, hereinafter designated the petitioner, and moves and prays for a correction of Judgment, and Sentence, on the grounds that the State Court did not have author-



ized jurisdiction of the petitioner at the time sentence was imposed. In support thereof, the petitioner moves and shows and prays the following to wit:

10

A

### JURISDICTIONAL STATEMENT

Section 2255 of Title 28 U.S.C.A. provides that.

B

### STATEMENT

Petitioner was arrested by F. B. I. agents on April 30th, 1950 at Norfolk, Virginia, shortly after released on bond. Indicted by Federal Grand Jury, at Newport News, Va., on July 10th, 1950, and bond continued. The trial then being set for July 28th, 1950, at which he didn't appear, and bond was forfeited. He was then re-arrested by Federal Authorities on Aug. 4, 1950, and confined in the Norfolk city jail to await trial on Sept. 13th, 1950, at which time he had no hearing as to why being tried by State.

On August 24th, 1950, he was taken from the Norfolk city jail by two agents and carried into Corporation Court No. 1, Judge Richard B. Spindle, Jr., presiding. He was tried on three separate charges of forgery and sentenced to two years in the State Penitentiary on each charge, said sentences to run concurrently. He was again returned to the Norfolk city jail for confinement.

11

### ARGUMENT

(A) The petitioner feels that his constitutional rights was violated under such transactions of the said courts, being tried by the State and sentenced while awaiting trial in U. S. Federal Court, at which time the petitioner had never been tried or convicted in United States Federal Court.

(B) The petitioner feels that the State Court or the U. S. Federal Court, relinquished its jurisdiction at this point. Being released from one court to be tried by another court before the court which first had jurisdiction, had performed its duty, the petitioner feels it unconstitutional, and one of the sentences is illegal and void, and should be set aside, vacated.

12

C

### FURTHER ARGUMENTS AND AUTHORITIES

A United States Court and State Court's Jurisdiction of the U. S. Federal Court and State Courts a direct interference with Federal

Jurisdiction and a violation of the Rule of Comity between Federal and State Courts.

*Grant v. Guernsey*, 10th Circuit, 63 F. 2d 163; January 23, 1933.

Criminal proceeding instituted before Justice during defendant's period of probation under Federal Court sentence, without first obtaining permission from Federal Court to be tried in State Court, held unauthorized.

Lewis, Circuit Judge.

The appellee was discharged from custody on his petition for Writ of Habeas Corpus. The facts disclosed by appellee's petition, the return order to show cause by Grant and Lewis respectively, County Attorney and Sheriff of Montgomery County, Kansas, and the hearing thereon are. In Sept. 1930, Guernsey "was indicted in the United States District Court for Kansas, for violation of the Banking Act, and pleaded guilty. He was sentenced to confinement for 3½ years. The District Judge placed Guernsey on probation.

13 Thereafter Appellant Grant instituted before a Justice of the Peace in Montgomery County, a criminal proceeding, charging Guernsey with embezzlement, committed prior to his sentence in the Federal Court, and caused him to be taken before Justice, for hearing on the charge.

Guernsey, through his counsel, at this point protested that he was thereunder jurisdiction of the Federal Court, subject to its order and that the proceedings before the Justice were an interference with that jurisdiction and could not rightly be maintained.

The County Attorney opposed. The Justice ruled with him. Evidence was taken and the Justice held Guernsey to appear at the next term of the State Court, to remain there to answer the charge, depart without leave and abide by the judgment of the Court.

It is argued here as it was before the Justice of the Peace that the State could acquire and did complete jurisdiction over the person of Guernsey, to hold him, to incarcerate him if necessary for the purpose of the trial. Counsel seem to doubt that the State could have immediately executed a sentence of imprisonment, but why not if jurisdiction is by right.

14 In *Donle v. Fessenden*, 258 U.S. 254, 42 S. Ct. 309-310.

The custody was an executive officer, and it was held that he could release his control of a Federal prisoner while a State Court tried him on a State charge.

There can be no doubt Guernsey was under the jurisdiction of the Federal Court subject to its order under the probation statute, at any time, and where the Justice of the Peace issued his warrant for the arrest of Guernsey, and held him for trial on the State charge, and that he abide the judgement of the Court, there was a direct in-

interference with Federal jurisdiction and a violation of the Rule of Comity, between Federal and State Courts.

In *Taylor v. Tainter*, 16 Wall. 366, 370 21 Fed. 287, it is said—where a State Court and a Court of the United States may each take jurisdiction, the tribunal which first gets it holds it to the exclusion of the other until its duty is fully performed, and this rule applies alike in both civil and criminal cases.

In the *Donzis*, *supra*, the Court said, it was there held that a statute gave to the Attorney General such control of the convict after he was imprisoned under the sentence as to authorize him to consent to the convict's trial in the State Court.

15 No statute is called to our notice and we know of none, that gives any officer the right here claimed by counsel representing the State.

No application was made to the United States District Judge and no authority cited, holding that he had the power and it was his duty to release control over Guernsey for prosecution in the State Court, with or without condition that he be released to the Federal Court after trial in State Court.

16

D

## CONCLUSION

In this motion, the petitioner has advanced the logical theory that the Honorable Court did not have jurisdiction to prosecute and impose a sentence of two years upon the petitioner, while the petitioner was awaiting prosecution on a Federal charge. Therefore the petitioner prays that the sentence in this case be vacated, set aside and held for naught, as being unconstitutional, as the court had no jurisdiction of the subject matter or of the person of the petitioner.

WHEREFORE, your petitioner sincerely prays that this Honorable Court will enter an order to return him to the jurisdiction of this court for hearing of the above cause, and after hearing the arguments of both parties herein, will enter an order to vacate, set aside, and hold for naught, this sentence imposed.

Respectfully submitted,

ROY WEBBER TINDER, JR.,  
P.M.B. 70573 Atlanta, Ga.  
Petitioner.

17

STATE OF GEORGIA,  
County of Fulton:

Sworn to before me on Dec. 6, 1950, by Roy Webber Tinder Jr. as being true and correct.

P. C. KINDEL,  
Notary Public, Fulton County, Georgia.

My Commission expires 9-11-51.

18

[File endorsement omitted]

In United States District Court

[Title omitted]

ORDER DENYING MOTION TO VACATE, SET ASIDE AND CORRECT  
SENTENCE—Filed January 18, 1951

Upon consideration of the motion of the defendant "to vacate, set aside and correct sentence", it conclusively appears from the said motion that the defendant is entitled to no relief, first because the sentence of which he complains was not passed by this Court but was entered by the Corporation Court of the City of Norfolk, Virginia, and secondly, if it is intended to vacate, set aside or correct the sentence passed by this Court on September 13, 1950, the said motion and the record of the case fail to disclose any ground to sustain said motion, and, therefore, it is

ORDERED that the said motion be denied.

Let a copy of this order be mailed by the Clerk to the said defendant and to the United States Attorney for this district.

ALBERT V. BRYAN,  
United States District Judge.

Norfolk, Virginia.

January 18, 1951.

19

[File endorsement omitted]

In United States District Court

[Title omitted]

ORDER ALLOWING DEFENDANT TO PROCEED IN FORMA PAUPERIS ETC.  
Filed September 19, 1951

Upon consideration of the motion of the defendant to correct the sentence imposed upon him in this court on September 13, 1950, and of his motion to proceed therein without the prepayment of costs or security therefor, it is

ORDERED that the motion of the defendant to proceed in forma pauperis is hereby granted, and the said motion is now filed, and it is further

ORDERED that the United States of America show cause, if any it can, before this Court at ten o'clock A. M., September 26, 1951, at Norfolk, Virginia, why the said sentence should not be vacated and corrected, and the defendant discharged from custody thereunder, as prayed in said motion, and it is also

ORDERED that a copy of this order, together with a copy of the said



10 ROY WEBBER TINDER, JR. VS. UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

20 motion be forthwith served upon the United States Attorney for this district by the Marshal, and that a copy of this order be mailed by the Clerk to the said defendant, but it shall not be necessary to produce the defendant at the hearing of the said motion.

ALBERT V. BRYAN,  
*United States District Judge.*

Alexandria, Virginia.

September 19, 1951.

21 In United States District Court

Aug. 1951

From Roy Webber Tinder, Jr.

P.M.B. 70573—Atlanta, Ga.

To Mr. Wallsley, E. Johnson, Clerk, U. S. District Court, Norfolk, Va.

Dear Sir:

Enclosed please find three (3) copies of Motion to Correct Illegal Sentences. Kindly present same to the Court forthwith and serve one copy on the United States Attorney.

The request for a speedy disposition is grounded upon the fact that should I be entitled to the relief prayed for, I shall have long past served my legal sentence.

Kindly acknowledge receipt of the Motion and letter personally to me.

Very truly yours,

ROY WEBBER TINDER, JR.,

P.M.B. 70573,

Atlanta, Georgia.

22

In United States District Court

[Title omitted]

AFFIDAVIT IN FORMA PAUPERIS

COUNTY OF FULTON,

State of Georgia, ss.

Comes now Roy Webber Tinder, Jr. the defendant in the above entitled cause and deposes and says that he is a citizen of the United States, that he verily believes his motion to correct illegal sentences is a meritorious cause of action and he is entitled to the redress he seeks thereby.

23. That he is a poor person unable to pay the clerk's fees for filing his motion nor the Court costs therein or give security for same; that his motion is made in good faith and is without levity.

Wherefore affiant-defendant pray he be granted leave to proceed upon his affidavit of poverty as made and provided by Section 1915 U.S.C. Title 28.

And he will ever pray.

ROY WEBBER TINDER, JR.,  
*Affiant-Defendant*

Subscribed and sworn to this 3rd day of August 1951.

This person known to me only by the records of the U. S. Penitentiary, Atlanta, Georgia.

MACON BARBEE,  
*Notary Public.*

[SEAL.]

Notary Public, Fulton County, Georgia. My Commission Expires Jun. 27, 1954.

24 In United States District Court

[Title omitted]

#### MOTION TO CORRECT ILLEGAL SENTENCES

Comes now Roy Webber Tinder, Jr., the defendant in the above entitled cause and prays this Honorable Court to correct the illegal sentences heretofore imposed upon him in this cause on September 13, 1950, and as grounds for his motion states:

One

The sentence imposed upon the defendant on Counts One to Six of the indictment are in excess of the maximum provided by Section 1708 U.S.C.A. Title 18.

25

Two

The indictment in Counts One to Six fails to charge the defendant did take from the letter box or mail receptacle of the named person a letter containing a check, article or thing, the face value of which was in an amount in excess of \$100 or more.

Three

The substance of the accusation contained in an indictment returned by a Grand Jury. Pursuant to 1708 U.S.C.A. Title 18, requires as made and provided by the Statute the indictment allege the value of the contents contained in the stolen mail matter in order to ground the jurisdiction of the Court to impose a penalty within the Statutory limits.



## Four

The prerequisite of Section 1708 U.S.C.A. Title 18 to grant the Court power and authority to impose a sentence in excess of one year and a fine of not more than \$1000 or both is the value or face value of any checks, article or things contained in the stolen mail matter.

26

## Five

The value or face value of the mail matter or the article or thing contained therein is an element of the offense and an indictment under Section 1708 U.S.C.A. Title 18 must contain the essential allegations of value to grant the Court jurisdiction to increase the provided statutory penalty.

## Six

The pertinent part of Section 1708 involved in this cause provides in part.

"Shall be fined not more than \$2000 or imprisoned not more than five years or both; but if the value or face value of any such article or thing does not exceed \$100 he shall be fined not more than \$1000 or imprisoned not more than one year or both.

## Seven

The defendant on the 13th day of September 1950, entered his plea of guilty to the six counts of the indictment No. 10-206 and was sentenced by the Court to a term of imprisonment for a period three (3) years on each count of the indictment, said sentences to run concurrently. Wherefore the concurrent sentence of (3) years imposed upon the defendant is two (2) years in excess of the jurisdiction of the Court.

27

## Eight

The defendant on July 12, 1951, with good time deductions as provided by Section 4162 U.S.C.A. Title 18, faithfully and fully completed the lawful and legal portion of sentence as constituted by law and is now being illegally restrained of his liberty.

## Nine

Section 2255 U.S.C.A. Title 28 provides in part:

"A prisoner in custody under sentence of a Court of the United States claiming the right to be released upon the ground that the sentence was imposed in violation of the Constitution or laws of the United States or the Court was without jurisdiction to impose

such sentence, or the sentence was in excess of the maximum authorized by law, or is otherwise subject to collateral attack may move the Court which imposed the sentence to vacate, set aside or correct sentence."

"A motion for such relief may be made at any time . . ."

28. Wherefore defendant prays that a writ of Habeas Corpus adprosequendum issue to the United States Marshal for the Eastern District of Virginia, Norfolk Division, commanding him to transport the defendant from the United States Penitentiary, Atlanta, Georgia, to the Eastern District of Virginia and thereafter produce him before the bar of the Court on the day and date certain named in the writ and thereupon he be discharged by due process of law; or in lieu thereof:

The Court correct the illegal sentence in accordance with law and the corrected judgment and commitment issue to William H. Hiatt, Warden, United States Penitentiary, Atlanta, Georgia with direction to discharge the defendant, without delay.

And the Defendant will ever pray.

ROY WEBBER TINDER, JR.  
*Defendant Prose.*

29. COUNTY OF FULTON,  
State of Georgia, ss.

AFFIDAVIT OF VERIFICATION

Personally appeared before me, a Notary Public one Roy Webber Tinder Jr. who after being duly sworn, on his oath deposes and says: That he has read the motion to correct illegal sentences and contents contained therein are true to the best of his information knowledge and belief. Further affiant sayeth not.

ROY WEBBER TINDER, JR.  
*Affiant Defendant.*

Subscribed and sworn to me this 3rd day of August 1951.

This person known to me only by the records of the U. S. Penitentiary, Atlanta, Georgia.

MACON BARBEE,  
*Notary Public.*

[SEAL]

Notary Public, Fulton County, Georgia. My Commission Expires  
Jun. 27, 1954.

30 [File endorsement omitted]

In United States District Court

[Title omitted]

MEMORANDUM OPINION DENYING MOTION TO VACATE SENTENCE—  
Filed October 4, 1951

By motion to vacate his sentence the defendant poses the question whether theft of the mail is punishable by imprisonment for more than a year if the matter stolen does not have a value or face value in excess of \$100.00.

On September 13, 1950 the defendant pleaded guilty to a six count indictment charging that in each instance he "did unlawfully and feloniously take from the letter box or mail receptacle" of a named addressee "a letter", contrary to the provisions of Title 18, sec. 1708, United States Code. The judgment and commitment records that the defendant was sentenced to imprisonment of "three (3) years on each count of the indictment, said sentences to run concurrently." The minutes of the Clerk are in accord. Unavoidably the stenographic transcript of the court reported is not available, but for the present ruling it is assumed that the formal judgment is conclusive of the terms of the sentence.

31 Inasmuch as the indictment lays no value, the letter in each count must be taken as not exceeding \$100.00 in value. The defendant argues that when the stolen object does not have a value beyond \$100.00, the statute limits the punishment to one year and a fine. As the sentence directs that the imprisonment on all the counts run concurrently, the total could, of course, be no more than the maximum punishment for one count. Therefore, he concludes, since he has now served the full authorized sentence, he should be released.

Because *Armstrong v. U. S.*, 9 Cir., 187 F. 2d 954, supports the defendant, I see his motion for hearing on notice to the United States Attorney. Arguments by counsel produced no other precedent, and it is conceded that the Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit has not had the point before it. While the Ninth Circuit is not peremptory authority here, it is very persuasive, and it is with deference, therefore, that I do not follow the *Armstrong* case, but I cannot agree with its conclusion.

The revision embraced in 48 USC 1708 evinces no intention on the part of the Congress to overturn its long-standing declaration that thievery of the mails should in all circumstances be a felony. The present statute became effective September 1, 1948, save for a

32 trivial amendment in 1949, and for many years prior all tampering with the mails was subject to imprisonment up to 5 years plus a fine of \$2,000.00. The revisers did not propose that the value provision inserted by them should qualify the penalty for every kind of mail theft. Five years and \$2,000.00 is still made the maximum by the new statute. The value clause, me judice was directed exclusively to the single offense of removing "any article or thing" contained within a unit of mail.

For convenience of reference the new statute is quoted:

"Sec. 1708. Theft or receipt of stolen mail matter generally.

"Whoever steals, takes, or abstracts, or by fraud or deception obtains, or attempts so to obtain, from or out of any mail, post office, or station thereof, letter box, mail receptacle, or any mail route or other authorized depository for mail matter, or from a letter or mail carrier, any letter, postal card, package, bag, or mail, or abstracts or removes from any such letter, package, bag, or mail, any article or thing contained therein, or secretes, embezzles, or destroys any such letter, postal card, package, bag, or mail, or any article or thing contained therein; or

"Whoever steals, takes, or abstracts, or by fraud or deception obtains any letter, postal card, package, bag, or mail, or any article or thing contained therein which has been left for collection upon or adjacent to a collection box or other authorized depository of mail matter; or

"Whoever buys, receives, or conceals, or unlawfully has in his possession, any letter, postal card, package, bag, or mail, or any article or thing contained therein, which has been so stolen, taken, embezzled, or abstracted, as herein described, knowing the same to have been stolen, taken, embezzled or abstracted—

33 "Shall be fined not more than \$2,000 or imprisoned not more than five years, or both, but if the value or face value of any such article or thing does not exceed \$100, he shall be fined not more than \$1,000 or imprisoned not more than one year, or both."

Perusal of the act's defining paragraphs—the first three—reveals that the Congress used the phrase "article or thing" as descriptive of something in addition to a "letter, postal card, package, bag, or mail." "Article or thing" is further narrowed in the statute as an object "contained" in a letter, package, or other enclosures commonly comprising mail. The Congress obviously intended to create a separate crime consisting alone of filching the contents of a letter, an offense not depending upon a taking of the letter. As the words "article or thing" are thus so clearly restricted in their meaning

when the crimes are defined, there is no warrant for ascribing a broader meaning to the phrase when it appear idem verbis in the penalty paragraph—the last—of the same statute.

This is not a strained interpretation. On the contrary, to make the value clause apposite to every phase of mail plunder would deprive the mails of their customary protection. Thus, it is quite possible for a sack, or indeed even many sacks, of mail not to have a "value or face value" in excess of \$100.00. For a certainty, the Congress did not conceive of so extensive an invasion of the mails as only a misdemeanor. Nor did it intend to encumber the criminal prosecution for a general pilfering of the mail with the  
34 burden of proving value, face or intrinsic. Because the value clause does in actuality seem so utterly inapplicable to the theft of a "letter, postal card, package, bag, or mail", I am confident that the Congress applied the provision only to the "article or thing contained therein", and not to the mail generally.

The motion will be denied.

ALBERT V. BRYAN,  
*United States District Judge.*

Alexandria, Virginia.

October 4th, 1951.

35

[File endorsement omitted]

In United States District Court

[Title omitted]

ORDER DENYING MOTION TO VACATE SENTENCE AND ALLOWING DEFENDANT TO PROCEED IN FORMA PAUPERIS—Filed October 4, 1951

Upon consideration of the motion of the defendant to vacate, set aside and correct the sentence imposed upon him in this Court on September 13, 1950, and of the motion of the defendant to proceed herein without the prepayment of fees and costs or security therefor, it is:

ORDERED that the motion of the defendant to proceed herein in forma pauperis be, and it is hereby granted, and the said motion is filed, and the Court having caused notice of the said motion of the defendant to vacate, set aside and correct the said sentence to be served upon the United States Attorney, and having heard the arguments thereof of counsel for the defendant and of the United States Attorney, is now of the opinion, for the reasons set forth in its memorandum filed herein, that the said sentence was not in excess of the maximum authorized by law and is not otherwise subject to collateral attack, it is further



36

ORDERED that the said motion to vacate, set aside and correct the said sentence be, and it is hereby, denied.

Let a copy of this order and of the said memorandum be mailed by the Clerk to the United States Attorney and to W. H. Starkey, Esquire, attorney for the defendant.

ALBERT V. BRYAN

*United States District Judge.*

Alexandria, Virginia.

October 4th, 1951.

37

[File endorsement omitted]

In United States District Court

[Title omitted]

NOTICE OF APPEAL—Filed October 12, 1951

Notice of Appeal is hereby given this 11th day of October 1950 that the defendants Notice of Appeal to the United States Circuit Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit from the judgment of the Court entered on the 4th day of October 1951 denying the motion to vacate judgement and sentence.

ROY WEBBER TINDER, JR.,

*Defendant,*

*P.M.B. #70573 Atlanta, Georgia.*

Form required by Title 28, U.S.C.A. Section 2255.

Dated: October 10th 1951.

38-39

In United States District Court

AFFIDAVIT

To whom it may concern:

I, Roy Webber Tinder Jr., in accordance with The Law prescribed in such cases under the Form of Pauper's (Paupers Oath) Do Hereby Swear and admit to the above by reason and virtue of being a poor person, without funds, monies or mediums used as legal currency for purpose of exchange or purchase in the United States of America and by acceptance of this oath solemnly acknowledge my inability financially to pay for any and all the legal documents required by me in the immediate issue.

ROY WEBBER TINDER, JR.,

*Appellant.*

Subscribed and Sworn to before me this 10 day of Oct. 1951.

T. C. KINDEL,

*Notary Public.*

[SEAL]

Notary Public, Fulton County, Georgia. My Commission Expires 9-11-55.



40

In United States District Court

[Title omitted]

DEFENDANTS DESIGNATION OF RECORD

Comes now Roy Webber Tinder, Jr., the defendant in the above entitled cause and designates the contents of the record to be contained on appeal and prays same to be prepared, certified and transmitted to the Clerk of the United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit, with reference to the Notice of Appeal filed by defendant in said cause and to include the following to wit:

1. Motion to Vacate Judgment and Sentence.
2. Indictments, judgments, and commitments, order denying motion.
3. Memorandum Opinion.
4. Notice of Appeal, Affidavits in forma pauperis.
5. Order allowing appeal, and this precipe.

Respectfully submitted,

ROY WEBBER TINDER, JR.,  
*Defendant.*

Dated: October 10th 1951.

41

[File endorsement omitted]

In United States District Court

[Title omitted]

ORDER ALLOWING DEFENDANT TO PROSECUTE AN APPEAL—Oct. 16, 1951

Upon motion of the defendant, it is

Ordered that the defendant may prosecute an appeal from the order denying his motion to vacate his sentence, without prepayment of, or security for, such fees and costs as may be required by law to be paid in this court for said appeal.

Let a copy hereof be mailed by the Clerk to the United States Attorney and to W. H. Starkey, Esquire, counsel for the defendant.

ALBERT V. BRYAN,

*United States District Judge.*

Alexandria, Virginia.

October 16th, 1951.

42 Clerk's Certificate to foregoing transcript omitted in printing.

43 In the United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit

No. 6354

[Title omitted]

### MINUTE ENTRIES

October 18, 1951, duplicate notice of appeal is filed and the cause docketed.

Note: The notice of appeal appears at page 32 of the record.

ORDER PERMITTING APPELLANT TO PROSECUTE APPEAL IN FORMA PAUPERIS, ETC.—Filed October 18, 1951

[Style of Court and Title Omitted]

Upon the affidavit and petition of the Appellant, and for good cause shown,

It is ordered that the Appellant be, and he is hereby, permitted to prosecute his appeal in this Court in the above entitled case in forma pauperis in accordance with Title 28 United States Code, Section 1915, without the prepayment of costs or the giving of security therefor, and to file six (6) typewritten copies of brief and appendix instead of the twenty-five (25) printed copies required by the rules, and to serve copy of said brief and appendix on opposing counsel.

October 15, 1951.

JOHN J. PARKER,  
Chief Judge, Fourth District.

October 18, 1951, copy of designation of record filed.

October 18, 1951, copy of order of Judge Bryan allowing appellant to prosecute appeal with prepayment of, or security  
44 for, fees and costs, filed.

October 24, 1951, brief of appellant is filed.

November 3, 1951, the record on appeal is filed.

November 6, 1951, the appearance of Golden N. Dagger and Justinus Gould is entered for the appellee.

November 10, 1951, brief and appendix for appellee are filed.

November 12, 1951, petition of appellant for a continuance of 10 days to traverse brief of appellee filed in open court. Continuance denied and appellant allowed to file a reply brief within 10 days.

## ARGUMENT OF CAUSE

November 12, 1951, (November term, 1951) cause came on to be heard before Parker and Soper, Circuit Judges, and Chesnut, District Judge, and was taken on brief of appellant, and argued on behalf of the appellee, and submitted.

November 15, 1951, traverse of appellant is filed.

November 23, 1951, reply brief of appellant is filed.

45 In United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit

No. 6354

ROY WEBBER TINDER, JR., Appellant,

*versus*

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, Appellee

Appeal from the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia, at Norfolk

(Argued November 12, 1951. Decided December 28, 1951)

OPINION—Filed December 28, 1951

Before PARKER and SOPER, *Circuit Judges*, and CHESNUT, *District Judge*

Roy Webber Tinder, Jr., Pro Se, on brief, and Justinus Gould, Attorney, Department of Justice, (James M. McInerney, Assistant Attorney General; George R. Humrickhouse, United States Attorney, and Golden N. Dagger, Attorney, Department of Justice on brief) for Appellee.

46 CHESNUT, *District Judge*:

The appellant in this case, Roy Webber Tinder, Jr., was indicted in the Eastern District of Virginia July 10, 1950 in six counts for the theft of six separate letters from the box or mail receptacles of six different persons on six separate dates on and between March 1, 1950 and May 3, 1950. The indictment was based on 18 USCA, s. 1708. On September 13, 1950, represented by counsel, he pleaded guilty to the whole indictment and was sentenced by District Judge Ben Moore to imprisonment for "three years on each count of the indictment, said sentences to run concurrently, unless sooner released by operation of law". On or about August 3, 1951 the defendant filed a motion under 28 USCA, s. 2255 to vacate or correct the sentence. This motion was denied on October 4, 1951 by District

Judge Bryan who filed a memorandum opinion upholding the legality of the sentence, and an order overruling the motion, from which this appeal has been taken.

Appellant's contention then and now is that the sentence imposed upon him was illegal and excessive because the indictment did not allege in any of the six counts that the stolen letters were of a value more than \$100 and therefore the maximum punishment under any count was not more than a fine of \$1,000 and imprisonment of not more than one year, and that, as the sentences on all six counts were made to run concurrently, and as he has now been in prison for more than a year, he is entitled to be released from further imprisonment.

The question presented requires us to determine the proper construction and application of section 1708 and particularly the fourth paragraph thereof which imposes the punishment for violations. The whole of the statute reads as follows. (We have italicized the phrases in all four paragraphs which we think sharply present the matter to be determined).

"1708. Theft or receipt of stolen mail matter generally"

"Whoever steals, takes, or abstracts, or by fraud or deception obtains, or attempts so to obtain, from or out of any mail, post office, or station thereof, letter box, mail receptacle, or any mail route or other authorized depository for mail matter, or from a letter or mail carrier, any letter, postal card, package, bag, or mail, or *abstracts or removes from any such letter, package, bag, or mail, any article or thing contained therein*, or secretes, embezzles, or destroys any such letter, postal card, package, bag, or mail, *or any article or thing contained therein*; or

"Whoever steals, takes, or abstracts, or by fraud or deception obtains any letter, postal card, package, bag, or mail, *or any article or thing contained therein* which has been left for collection upon or adjacent to a collection box or other authorized depository of mail matter; or

"Whoever buys, receives, or conceals, or unlawfully has in his possession, any letter, postal card, package, bag, or mail, *or any article or thing contained therein*, which has been so stolen, taken embezzled, or abstracted, as herein described, knowing the same to have been stolen, taken, embezzled, or abstracted,—

"Shall be fined not more than \$2,000 or imprisoned not more than five years, or both; but if the value or face value of *any such article or thing* does not exceed \$100, he shall be fined not more than \$1,000 or imprisoned not more than one year, or both."

It will be noted that the precise question is whether the phrase "any article or thing" as used in the first, second and third para-

graphs and the phrase "any such article or thing" in the fourth paragraph properly includes letters which have been stolen from letter boxes or mail receptacles. Or, otherwise stated, is the theft of letters from the mail still to be classed as a felony or only as a misdemeanor unless it is alleged and proved that the letter had a "value or face value" in excess of \$100. Under the revised federal criminal code (18 USCA, 1948 Ed.) the distinction between felonies and misdemeanors is still dependent upon the amount of the maximum punishment authorized by the statute for each particular crime. If the maximum imprisonment exceeds a year the offense is a felony; if not, a misdemeanor (18 USCA, s. 1). It is the contention of the appellant that by the fourth paragraph of section 1708 the grade of the offense of theft of letters from the mail has been reduced to a misdemeanor in every case unless it is alleged and proved that the value of the letters stolen was more than \$100. The Government denies the correctness of this contention and after careful consideration of the question we have concluded that the Government's contention is correct and that of the appellant is unsound.

The appellant's precisely stated contention is that the phrase "any such article or thing" in the fourth paragraph of section 1708 includes the word "letter" contained in the first paragraph and necessarily also in the second and third paragraphs. We do not think this was the intention of Congress in enacting the wording of the section, by the revision of 1948. The history of the statute is both pertinent and persuasive, but before adverting to it, we will first consider the wording of the section as presently expressed. An analysis of the first three paragraphs of the section will show that the wording consists principally of (1) acts prohibited and (2) subjects affected thereby. It will be noted that the acts are differently stated in each of the first three paragraphs and include (a) steal, take or abstract, (b) abstract or remove from letters, packages, box or mail, (c) secrete, embezzle or destroy and (d) buy, receive, conceal or unlawfully have in possession. But the subjects of the prohibited acts are uniformly described in each of the three paragraphs as a letter, postal card, package, bag or mail, or *any article or thing contained therein*. The fourth paragraph specifies the penalty for any violation of any of the first three paragraphs with the proviso "but if the value or face value of any *such* article or thing does not exceed \$100, he shall be fined not more than \$1,000 or imprisoned not more than one year, or both". As a mere grammatical matter it is apparent that the article or thing so referred to in the proviso is that article or thing which is referred to in the first three paragraphs; and it will be noted that such article or thing has been described as "any article or thing" *contained* in a letter, etc. There is thus grammatically a clear distinction made by the statute between a letter and the removal of an article or thing from the



letter. A letter is, of course, a medium for communicating ideas or thoughts and is in itself intrinsically not a thing of a tangible nature; while the ordinary conception of an article or thing is of something that is tangible and susceptible of valuation.

Again, the proviso in the fourth paragraph is coupled with the condition that the article or thing has a value or face value not exceeding \$100. The word "value" obviously refers to market, actual or computable value of a tangible thing, and the words "face value" were doubtless inserted to comprehend securities such as promissory notes, bonds or other documents which on their face purport to carry obligations of a stated monetary amount. We think, therefore, that grammatically considered the section makes a clear distinction between letters and articles or things which have been contained in letters and have been removed therefrom with or without the theft or destruction of the letter as the container. And it will have been noted that in the proviso of the 4th paragraph as to the limited maximum punishment the description of the article or thing is "any such article or thing". The reference here is to the same article or thing which has been described in the first, second and third paragraphs and we think clearly means a tangible thing in contrast with a letter which intrinsically has no assignable value or face value.

This construction of the language of section 1708 as it now exists is fortified by the history of the statute. The earliest statute which we have noted providing penalties for theft or robbery of the mail is section 19 of chapter 37 of the Acts of 1810 (2 Stat. 598). It prohibited and punished theft or pilfering or tampering with the mail in much the same language found in the present section 1708; and distinguished between the theft of letters containing "any article of value, or evidence of any debt, due, demand, right or claim, or any release, receipt, acquittance or discharge" and letters "not containing any article of value or evidence thereof". The maximum punishment for the former offense was 7 years and for the latter a fine of \$500. The next Act upon the subject, section 22 of chapter 64 of the Acts of 1825, (4 Stat. 109), is in very similar language but it increased the penalty for theft of letters containing "any article of value" to not less than 2 nor exceeding 10 years, and also increased the penalty for taking a letter not containing an article of value to a fine not exceeding \$500 and imprisonment not exceeding 12 months. The next Act is section 281 of chapter 335 of the Acts of 1872 (17 Stat. 318) which made a distinction between the theft of a letter itself and the theft or opening or destroying of a letter containing notes, bonds, drafts, checks and similar writings or pecuniary obligations or securities, and made the penalty for both on conviction imprisonment at hard labor for not less than one nor more than 5 years.

Without much significant change in phraseology the statute was reenacted from time to time as it appears in the Revised



Statutes (Rev. Stat. 5469) and in chapter 321, sec. 194 of the Acts of 1909 (35 Stat. 1125) until it became section 317 of title 18, 1940 edition, by the phraseology of which distinction is again made between the theft of a letter and of "any article or thing contained therein". And without distinction as to amount or value the maximum penalty was a fine of not more than \$2,000 or imprisonment of not more than 5 years or both. Section 317 of title 18, 1940 edition, was by the revision of 1948 carried into section 1708 with commendable condensation and simplification of phraseology but apparently without intended substantial change in effect, except for the addition of the proviso in paragraph 4 of the section which reduces the maximum penalty in case the article or thing taken does not exceed \$100 in value.

In the Reviser's notes to section 1708 (see 18 USC, Cong. Serv. p. 2576) it is said (referring to the proviso in the 4th paragraph) as follows:

"The smaller penalty for an offense involving \$100 or less was added (see ss. 641 and 645 of this title)".

Section 641 punishes the theft or embezzlement of public money, property or records and provides therefor as a maximum penalty a fine of not more than \$10,000 or imprisonment of not more than 10 years, or both, but with the proviso reading:

"But if the value of such property does not exceed the sum of \$100, he shall be fined not more than \$1,000 or imprisoned not more than one year, or both".

Section 645 punishes embezzlement by court officers of money coming into their hands officially and makes the penalty a fine and imprisonment of not more than 10 years, or both; but again with the proviso reading:

"but if the amount embezzled does not exceed \$100, he shall be fined not more than \$1,000 or imprisoned not more than one year, or both".

Again sections 646-654; 656-659 and 662 contain similar provisos limiting the maximum punishment in cases of pecuniary value to a fine of not more than \$1,000 or imprisonment for not more than one year, or both. See also the statement of William W. Barron, Chief Reviser, with respect to changes in punishment made in the revision of 1948, found in 18 USC, Cong. Serv. p. 2667.

From this historical review of the statute it appears that at least since 1872 a theft of letters from the mail has been regarded as a felony because punishable by a maximum sentence of 5 years; and it also appears that from even earlier statutes down to and including

the present time a distinction has been made with respect to the theft of letters intrinsically considered as such, and the theft of articles or a thing of value contained in such a letter in the mail. We also find from the Reviser's notes with respect to the presently worded section 1708 that the proviso in the fourth paragraph limiting the maximum imprisonment to not more than a year was not adopted for any particular or specific reason applicable to section 1708 but in pursuance of a general plan by the Revisers to make uniform and more modern the punishment for theft, embezzlement or wrongful conversion of money or things of pecuniary value of not more than \$100. We think it logically follows from this that it was not the intention of Congress to change the classification of theft of letters from the mail from that of a felony, which it had been for many years and through many revisions and reenactments of the statute, into a mere misdemeanor. If the appellant's contention is correct it would practically be impossible to treat the theft of a letter however weighty and important to the sender or receiver as a felony because it would be seemingly impossible to allege and prove that the letter had a value of more than \$100. It can hardly be said that a letter, apart from money, checks or other things of value contained therein and separately considered, has any assignable "value or face value". But on the other hand a moment's reflection will bring to mind the vast and sometimes almost incalculable importance of the ideas, messages and mental expressions contained in some letters, as, for instance, correspondence of governmental officials in the diplomatic, military or judicial service of the country or business correspondence which by letters create contracts of great importance to the users of the mail, or indeed personal or family letters containing information or messages of joy or grief or otherwise affecting domestic relations. Therefore, while it would be impossible to assign pecuniary value to such letters intrinsically considered, their importance to the sender or receiver may be of much significance, and the unlawful theft of them from the mails might entail very large consequential damages. In view of the great importance of the safe carriage and delivery of the mail in our economic and social life, it seems to us almost inconceivable that it was the intention of Congress in the last revision of section 1708 to reduce the crime of unlawful theft of letters from the mail from the grade of a felony to that of a misdemeanor.

The appellant's principal reliance is placed on the decision of the 9th Circuit in the case of *Armstrong v. United States*, 187, F. 2d 954, which, it must be conceded, does clearly support the contention. We have carefully considered the opinion of that eminent court but find that we are not able to agree with the result reached, for the reasons heretofore given.

We are not unmindful of the rule that criminal statutes

must be strictly construed where uncertain or ambiguous, but this does not require that the statute be given the narrowest possible meaning or that the Congressional evident intent should be disregarded. *United States v. Giles*, 300 U. S. 41, 48; *Singer v. United States*, 323 U. S. 338, 342; *Haggar v. Helvering*, 308 U. S. 389, 394; *United States v. Raynor*, 302 U. S. 540, 552.

For these reasons we conclude that the order appealed from must be

Affirmed.

55 In United States Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit

No. 6354

ROY WEBBER TINDER, JR., APPELLANT

VS.

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA, APPELLEE

Appeal from the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia

JUDGMENT—Filed and Entered December 28, 1951

This cause came on to be heard on the record from the United States District Court for the Eastern District of Virginia, and was argued by counsel.

On consideration whereof, it is now here ordered and adjudged by this Court that the judgment of the said District Court appealed from, in this cause, be, and the same is hereby, affirmed.

JOHN J. PARKER,

Chief Judge, Fourth Circuit.

MORRIS A. SOPER,

U. S. Circuit Judge.

W. CALVIN CHESNUT,

U. S. District Judge.

ORDER STAYING MANDATE (omitted in printing)

56 ORDER AUTHORIZING CLERK TO USE ORIGINAL TRANSCRIPT  
OF RECORD IN MAKING UP RECORD FOR SUPREME COURT  
(omitted in printing)

57 Clerk's certificate to foregoing transcript omitted in  
printing.

58 Supreme Court of the United States, October Term, 1951

No. 305, Misc.

[Title omitted]

ORDER ALLOWING CERTIORARI—June 9, 1952

On consideration of the motion for leave to proceed herein in forma pauperis and of the petition for writ of certiorari, it is ordered by this Court that the motion to proceed in forma pauperis be, and the same is hereby, granted; and that the petition for writ of certiorari be, and the same is hereby granted. The case is transferred to the appellate docket as No. 113, October Term, 1952, and placed on the summary docket.

It is further ordered that the duly certified copy of the transcript of the proceedings below which accompanied the petition shall be treated as though filed in response to such writ.